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Sixth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat

I. Introduction

1. In adopting its resolution 2253 (2015), the Security Council expressed its determination to address the threat posed to international peace and security by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) and associated individuals and groups. In paragraph 97 of that resolution, the Council requested that I provide an initial strategic-level report on the threat, followed by updates every four months. In its resolution 2368 (2017), the Council requested that I continue to provide strategic-level reports that reflect the gravity of the aforementioned threat, as well as the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering this, with the next report to be provided by 31 January 2018, followed by updates every six months thereafter.

2. I have made counter-terrorism one of my highest priorities. This is my first report since the establishment of the Office of Counter-Terrorism in June 2017. The Office has been mandated to enhance coordination and coherence in United Nations efforts to counter terrorism and to strengthen the provision of capacity-building assistance to Member States in response to the evolving threat of terrorism.

3. This, my sixth report on the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security,[1] was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,[2] in close collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism and other United Nations entities and international organizations.

4. The report shows that, despite the recent setbacks experienced by ISIL, the group and its affiliates continue to pose a significant and evolving threat around the world. The United Nations is committed to supporting Member States in facing this challenge and I am confident that the newly established Office of Counter-Terrorism will help deliver an All-of-United Nations approach to support the efforts of Member

[1] See S/2016/92, S/2016/501, S/2016/830, S/2017/97 and S/2017/467.

[2] The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities.

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States to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism, in particular in relation to the threat posed by global terrorist groups such as ISIL.

II. Threat assessment[1]

A. Overview of threat

5. During the last six months, military pressure has resulted in strategic setbacks for ISIL[4] in Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and the southern Philippines, as a result of which the group has been forced to relinquish strongholds in urban areas and to adapt to altered circumstances.[5]

6. The group continues to give prominence to external attacks and has lost its focus on conquering and holding territory. ISIL is now organized as a global network, with a flat hierarchy and less operational control over its affiliates.[6] Member States have highlighted that the willingness of some members of the ISIL and Al-Qaida (QDe.004) networks to support one another's attacks (S/2016/629, para. 3) remains a concern, and the potential convergence of the two networks, at least in some areas, is an emerging threat.

7. It is likely that, in the absence of its focus on conquering and holding territory, the pool of recruits for ISIL will reduce. ISIL was able to attract a wide range of individuals, including some who were eager to support the establishment of a quasi-state structure. In future, it will focus primarily on a smaller and more motivated group of individuals willing to fight or conduct attacks. In combination with increased control measures put in place by Member States, this will diminish new recruitment and the travel of foreign terrorist fighters. Overall, the global flow of such fighters into the conflict zones in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic has nearly come to a halt, with only occasional reporting of newly recruited fighters from Member States.

8. Furthermore, the structure of the ISIL core global propaganda machinery and the frequency, scope and quality of its output continue to deteriorate.[7] The group has begun to issue false claims of responsibility for attacks.[8] In addition, some of its important online magazines are no longer issued. Nevertheless, Member States highlighted that foreign terrorist fighters, ISIL members and sympathizers are still able to use social media, including encryption technology and communication tools within the dark web, to communicate, coordinate and facilitate attacks. Member States remain concerned that the threat to their homeland will be exacerbated by a growing number of "frustrated travellers",[9] the continuing risk of the recruitment by terrorist groups of insiders from within critical infrastructure[10] and the capabilities that returnees and relocators can bring to existing networks of ISIL sympathizers.

9. The fight against ISIL is entering a new phase, with more focus on less visible networks of individuals and cells acting with a degree of autonomy. This presents, to

[1] This threat assessment is based on the twenty-first report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) (S/2018/14).

[4] Listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq (QDe.115).

[5] Information provided by a Member State. This transformation has been ongoing for over a year. See also S/2017/573, paras. 16 and 17.

[6] Information provided by a Member State.

[7] S/2017/35, para. 17, and S/2017/573, para. 20.

[8] Information provided by a Member State.

[9] The term "frustrated travellers" refers to individuals who demonstrate the intention to travel to conflict zones, but are unable to do so owing to increased control measures by Member States, and remain radicalized.

[10] S/2017/573, para. 10, and resolution 2341 (2017).

a certain extent, a more difficult challenge for Member States, as well as the international community. Information sharing concerning the identity of foreign terrorist fighters, returnees, relocators and known ISIL members will remain vital. The ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list remains one of the key global instruments in this regard.[11]

10. Member States are conscious that, following the strategic military setbacks of ISIL in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, foreign terrorist fighters, in particular those from outside the immediate region, may decide to leave the conflict zones as they cannot easily blend in with the local population. Identifying these potential returnees and relocators may prove challenging. ISIL has collected travel and identification documents from incoming fighters for potential use in future travel[12] and has obtained several thousand blank Syrian passports.[13] Although the booklet numbers of the blank Syrian passports are included in the Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), Member States highlighted that their use by returnees or relocators is possible.

11. In addition, Member States bordering the conflict zones highlighted continued challenges in identifying individuals as foreign terrorist fighters, returnees, relocators or listed individuals. Biometric identification of suspicious individuals can be an effective tool to counter the threat of terrorists attempting to travel internationally using false, forged or altered travel documents. Therefore, the inclusion of biometric data, high quality pictures and fingerprints of such fighters in various regional and international databases, including the INTERPOL database on foreign terrorist fighters, remains important. On 21 December 2017, the Security Council adopted resolution 2396 (2017), updating resolution 2178 (2014) and highlighting the issue of returnees and relocators, as well as the use of biometric data. The resolution addressed a range of threats and included some of the measures outlined by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in its reports and recommendations since 2016.

B. Regional trends

1. Middle East

12. Having been driven from Al-Qaim in Iraq and Al Bukamal in the Syrian Arab Republic, ISIL no longer holds control over urban areas in either State.[14] Clandestine terror cells remain in some cities, and small ISIL groups are located east of the Euphrates River, in the south-west of the Syrian Arab Republic and in northern Iraq. Several Member States reported that ISIL fighters have fled towards the north of the Syrian Arab Republic and may attempt to leave the country. A second small group has moved towards the south of the country.[15] Member States are currently unable to assess with confidence the number of foreign terrorist fighters remaining in either country.

13. The ability of ISIL to generate revenues was considerably weakened during the reporting period, largely owing to the group's loss of control over oil and gas fields

[11] Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1904 (2009) and subsequent related resolutions, the Office of the Ombudsperson to the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee reviews requests from individuals, groups, undertakings or entities seeking to be removed from the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list of the Security Council's ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee.

[12] Information provided by a Member State.

[13] Information provided by a Member State.

[14] Information provided by a Member State.

[15] Information provided by a Member State.

in the Syrian Arab Republic.[16] Because of these and other losses, ISIL's revenues have fallen by more than 90 per cent since 2015.[17] These losses notwithstanding, the group may not have completely lost the ability to profit from hydrocarbons, and it could continue to obtain funds through extortion and the control of checkpoints.[18] As previously reported by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, ISIL is expected to return to "Al-Qaida-in-Iraq-style" financing methods, such as extortion.[19] Despite heavy military pressure, funds have continued to flow from the ISIL core to its branches.[20] Nonetheless, affiliates are increasingly looking for ways to diversify their income and to become financially independent from the ISIL core.[21]

14. ISIL is moving funds through networks and facilitators across the Middle East, using hawala systems and cash couriers,[22] and is infiltrating legitimate businesses in the region by using fronts, such as ostensibly "clean" individuals who can access the formal financial system.[23] The concern remains that ISIL may use such businesses to generate profits and invest laundered funds locally, regionally and internationally.[24] As international reconstruction funds begin to flow into liberated areas, the potential misuse of investments in the local economy, especially in businesses such as construction companies, is a significant concern.[25]

15. ISIL in Yemen remains weaker than Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (QDe.129). It retains a presence in the central and southern regions of Yemen and, according to reports from Member States, continues to recruit actively in the country. Its cells are active in Aden and Al-Bayda provinces, where the group has conducted several terrorist attacks and assassinations against Yemeni officials, in addition to a vehicle-borne improvised-explosive-device attack targeting the Ministry of Finance in Aden. ISIL continues its attempts to set up training camps in Yemen. Those camps were targeted by counter-terrorism efforts in October and November 2017. The group continues to urge its fighters not to defect to other groups and regularly releases propaganda videos, articles and imagery that aim to maintain group cohesion. This material is frequently critical of AQAP, which has announced several defections by ISIL fighters on its own media outlets.

16. ISIL also continues to target the wider region. According to Member States, it has used the prevailing security challenges in Yemen to plot, direct, instigate, resource and recruit individuals for attacks against States of the region. In September 2017, Saudi Arabia disrupted the group's attempts to attack two headquarters buildings of the Ministry of Defence in Riyadh.

2. Africa

17. Member States expressed concern at the resilience of the two separate wings of ISIL operating in Egypt. The more established affiliate, based in the Sinai Peninsula, is Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which publicly declared allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi[26] in November 2014.[27] The group seized cash in October 2017 during a bank robbery in El Arish, North Sinai, the Governorate in which the group is now

[16] Information provided by a Member State.
[17] Information provided by a Member State.
[18] Information provided by a Member State.
[19] S/2017/35, para. 22.
[20] Information provided by a Member State.
[21] Information provided by a Member State. See also S/2017/467, para. 12.
[22] Information provided by a Member State. See also S/2017/573, para. 2.
[23] Information provided by a Member State.
[24] Information provided by a Member State.
[25] Information provided by a Member State. See also S/2017/467, para. 16.
[26] Listed as Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai (QDi.299).
[27] S/2017/35, para. 41.

concentrated. In November 2017, it attacked a mosque in nearby Al-Rawda, killing more than 300 worshippers.[28]

18. On the Egyptian mainland, cells of ISIL sympathizers have also been responsible for a string of attacks against the Coptic Christian community.[29] According to one Member State, several individuals accused of involvement in the attacks have been arrested. These cells have fewer members than Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, and are less structured. They do cooperate, but Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis does not control ISIL activity on the Egyptian mainland.[30] There is movement between ISIL in Egypt and ISIL in Libya across the desert borders, and a senior Libyan ISIL member is on the Shura Council of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis.[31]

19. Member States noted that ISIL remained determined to rebuild its capabilities in Libya. Its numbers have been reinforced in many locations by fighters transferred from southern Libya and by foreign terrorist fighters returning or relocating from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Although its overall threat has decreased in terms of intensity, it continues to plan and execute sporadic attacks in Libya in order to demonstrate its continued relevance to its sympathizers.

20. Other ISIL affiliates in Africa are reported to have sent fighters to Libya to support and to gain the cooperation of ISIL cells located in the country.[32] Member States outlined that this relates, in particular, to training fighters, supplying weapons and logistical support. Boko Haram[33] also maintains small cells inside Libya.[34] Member States expressed concern at the potential movement of Boko Haram members to other States of the region across Libya's western and south-eastern borders.[35]

21. To generate income, ISIL in Libya runs extortion rackets through roadblocks and roving checkpoints.[36] It also continues to "tax" human smuggling and trafficking networks, although it is unclear whether it controls the networks themselves.[37]

22. Member States noted that in West Africa the threat posed by ISIL-related groups continued to spread into Mali and neighbouring States. According to one Member State, the faction of Al Mourabitoun (QDe.141) loyal to ISIL (S/2017/35, paras. 43 and 44),[38] remains a threat in Mali and Niger. Boko Haram and ISIL in West Africa are active in separate regions, and there are no reports of friction between them according to Member States. Boko Haram's increasing use of suicide bombers is a major concern for Member States.

23. In West Africa, terrorist groups finance themselves using kidnapping for ransom, theft and extortion. Member States noted that "taxation" of the flow of drugs, individuals and goods by ISIL-related groups also augments their income.[39] The continued movement of foreign terrorist fighters through the region continues to be a concern for Member States. In addition, some fighters have reportedly switched allegiance between groups to improve their economic situation.[40]

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[28] Information provided by a Member State
[29] Information provided by a Member State
[30] Information provided by a Member State
[31] Information provided by a Member State
[32] Information provided by a Member State
[33] Listed as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (QDe.138)
[34] Information provided by a Member State
[35] Information provided by a Member State
[36] Information provided by a Member State
[37] Information provided by a Member State
[38] The group calls itself "Islamic State in the Greater Sahara"
[39] Information provided by a Member State
[40] Information provided by a Member State

24. In East Africa, the Al-Qaida affiliate Al-Shabaab is more active than the emerging ISIL affiliates in Puntland and southern Somalia. Member States report that although ISIL remains weak, it has established underground cells in some regions. These cells are controlled and directed from the central command in Puntland. ISIL continues to recruit through facilitators based in countries in Europe and in Libya and Somalia.

25. ISIL's expansion and activities in East Africa were curtailed during 2017 by several factors. Member States assessed that Sheikh Abdikadir Mumin (not listed) and his subordinates are involved in a power struggle, which has paralyzed ISIL activities in the region. Since the previous report, Mumin has not directed his fighters to conduct attacks because he is unable to delegate responsibilities to his deputies, and the rivalry between Al-Shabaab and ISIL affiliates continues to undermine his influence. Al-Shabaab is determined to ensure that ISIL does not eclipse it in Somalia. Moreover, the Puntland authorities continue to crack down on ISIL, reducing its impact and operations.

26. ISIL in Yemen continues to provide material and training support to ISIL in Somalia, although the support is limited and unreliable.[41] Member States therefore consider that ISIL can no longer afford to pay its fighters at previous levels. Like Al-Shabaab, ISIL has begun to collect revenues from local populations. This development is likely to fuel further conflict between the two groups as they compete over the control of resources in their areas of operation. Former Al-Shabaab fighters who relocated to Yemen continue to facilitate the travel of foreign terrorist fighters, couriers and individuals performing logistical tasks between Somalia and Yemen.[42]

27. Human-trafficking and smuggling networks operating in the region offer covert services to various destinations, including to Libya.[43] These networks are likely to be used by relocating or returning foreign terrorist fighters, who prefer to use broken routes and to avoid travelling through cities, choosing instead to travel through remote areas to evade detection. Some Member States reported that they had arrested foreign terrorist fighters on their way to Libya to join ISIL. Member States also stated that they regularly arrested groups of returnees consisting of families of foreign terrorist fighters believed to have died in combat in Libya.[44]

3. Europe

28. ISIL continues to motivate and influence attacks in Europe, and the region remains high on the group's priority list.[45] Foreign terrorist fighters are increasingly using the Internet and social media to communicate with followers in Europe and to support their plans to conduct attacks. The dissemination of terror-attack methodologies and guidance and designs for the building of improvised explosive devices over the Internet and social media is considered a major security challenge for Member States.

29. Member States report continued links between Europe-based ISIL supporters (including Al-Qaida facilitators) and foreign terrorist fighters located in conflict zones and elsewhere. The attacks carried out in Spain in August 2017 demonstrated the potential impact of such transnational links.[46] However, during the reporting period, only a small number of newly recruited foreign terrorist fighters from Europe

[41] Information provided by a Member State.
[42] Information provided by a Member State.
[43] Information provided by a Member State.
[44] Information provided by a Member State.
[45] Information provided by a Member State.
[46] Information provided by a Member State.

travelled to the conflict zones, and the stream of returnees slowed.[47] Member States noted that returnees might increase the terrorist capabilities, in particular the bomb-making skills, of local networks and individuals, including "frustrated travellers".

4. Central and South Asia

30. The travel of foreign terrorist fighters from Central and South Asia to Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic has virtually ceased. However, over the past two years, relocated foreign terrorist fighters from Central Asia have been involved in terrorist attacks in Europe, the Russian Federation and Turkey. Member States remain concerned that returnees might exacerbate the terrorism threat in this region.

31. Despite having been further weakened by Afghan and international military operations, ISIL in Afghanistan continues to mount aggressive attacks, especially in Kabul. Overall, ISIL commands between 1,000 and 4,000 fighters in Afghanistan, including former members of the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (QDe.132), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (QDe.010), fighters from outside the immediate region and Afghan defectors from the Taliban. Some Member States expressed concern that, over time, the presence of ethnic Uzbek and Tajik fighters in northern Afghanistan could potentially lead to an ISIL threat to Central Asia.

32. ISIL in Afghanistan has received some funds from the ISIL core, but the group recognizes that funding may not continue; it has been encouraged to become more self-sufficient. It currently lacks large internal revenue sources and will struggle to survive without support from the ISIL core. The group has generated some funds through extortion and the proceeds from agricultural production in Nangarhar Province[48] and timber production, as well as from kidnapping for ransom.[49] There is no indication that it is involved in the drug trade.[50]

33. In Pakistan, military operations conducted in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas have sought to deny ISIL the opportunity to establish an organizational structure.[51] Terrorist attacks claimed by ISIL are carried out mainly by members of local groups, with cross-border planning and support from ISIL.[52]

5. South-East Asia

34. During the reporting period, ISIL affiliates suffered significant setbacks in South-East Asia, most notably the loss of Marawi City in the southern Philippines. The loss of Marawi City followed five months of fierce urban warfare and resulted in the death of Isnilon Totoni Hapilon (QDi.204), the "emir" of ISIL in East Asia,[53] the Maute brothers[54] and the influential Malaysian militant Mahmud Ahmad.[55]

35. Nonetheless, the threat persists, and the group's losses in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic may intensify the threat to South-East Asia, as funds and fighters disperse from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.[56] The region has seen a substantial increase in terrorist plots over the past two years.[57] Furthermore, even though the

[47] Information provided by a Member State.
[48] Information provided by a Member State.
[49] Information provided by a Member State.
[50] Information provided by a Member State.
[51] Information provided by a Member State.
[52] Information provided by a Member State.
[53] S/2017/35, para. 59. See also Australia's proscription of Islamic State East Asia (see www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganizations).
[54] S/2017/573, paras. 59 and 60.
[55] Information provided by a Member State.
[56] Information provided by a Member State.
[57] Information provided by a Member State.

protracted siege of Marawi City was a significant blow to the group's ambitions in the region, some Member States asses that it represented a symbolic and propaganda victory for ISIL, and could serve as inspiration for other militants.

36. Funding from the ISIL core facilitated the siege of Marawi City. Groups in the southern Philippines received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the ISIL core, through a third country, in advance of the siege.[58] The events in Marawi City may also have enabled ISIL affiliates to generate funds through the looting of banks.[59]

37. In Indonesia, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah[60] and Jamaah Ansarul Khilafah remain key ISIL-linked networks. Both have established a presence in several provinces.[61] The ideological leader of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah is Oman Rochman (QDi.407), and Jamaah Ansarul Khilafah is led by Abu Husna (not listed), a former prisoner and once key member of Jemaah Islamiyah (QDe.092).[62] Thus far, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah has been responsible for carrying out more attacks, but Jamaah Ansarul Khilafah is considered to be a growing threat.[63]

38. Over recent years, Malaysia has disrupted several plots, including plots directed from the Syrian Arab Republic, locally inspired attacks and lone-actor attacks. The Movida nightclub bombing (which was directed by ISIL) was the only successful attack (S/2017/35, para. 60).[64] In 2017, Malaysia disrupted cells that were recruiting foreign terrorist fighters to join the fight in southern Philippines.[65]

III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat

39. The United Nations, Member States, international, regional and subregional organizations have continued to both develop new tools and to promote the more effective use of existing ones to address the evolving threat posed by ISIL, including its affiliates, supporters and returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters. Since my last report in May 2017 (S/2017/467), the Security Council has adopted several resolutions reflecting the wide range of responses required to address this evolving phenomenon.

40. The Security Council: (a) in its resolution 2354 (2017), emphasized the need to counter terrorist narratives; (b) in its resolution 2370 (2017), urged Member States to act cooperatively to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons and called upon them to counter threats posed by improvised explosive devices and to become party to the related international and regional instruments; (c) in its resolution 2379 (2017), addressed the issue of accountability for crimes committed by ISIL in the territory of Iraq; (d) in its resolution 2388 (2017), called upon Member States to increase their capacity to proactively investigate and undertake other measures to more effectively track and disrupt human trafficking in the areas affected by armed conflict, particularly when linked or potentially linked to terrorist financing and recruitment and/or the commission of terrorist acts; and (e) in its resolution 2396 (2017), addressed the issue of foreign terrorist fighters with a particular focus on returning and relocating fighters and the new set of challenges that this new phase presents for Member States.

[58] Information provided by a Member State.
[59] Information provided by a Member State.
[60] S/2017/573, para. 62.
[61] Information provided by a Member State.
[62] Information provided by a Member State.
[63] Information provided by a Member State.
[64] Information provided by a Member State.
[65] Information provided by a Member State.

41. On 21 August 2017, the Counter-Terrorism Committee submitted to the Security Council an updated version of the "Technical Guide to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and other relevant resolutions". The Technical Guide is prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in order to assist Member States in their efforts to implement the Council resolutions on terrorism and to facilitate its provision of technical assistance to Member States.

42. Furthermore, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2396 (2017), the newly established Office of Counter Terrorism is continuing to update and coordinate United Nations efforts to address the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters under its foreign terrorist fighters capacity-building implementation plan. The plan includes 50 capacity-building projects submitted by 13 United Nations entities, addressing the full life cycle of the foreign-terrorist-fighter phenomenon, from prevention, financing, travel of foreign terrorist fighters and relocators, to prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration upon their return. The implementation of the plan is prioritized by degree of criticality based on assessments made by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. The plan, which has a total budget of $107 million over five years, is 41 per cent funded, with 8.8 per cent of the total amount coming from the Office of Counter Terrorism and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre.

A. Countering the financing of terrorism

43. Since my previous report, Member States, international, regional and subregional organizations and the private sector have continued to strengthen the integration of financial intelligence into counter-terrorism efforts. Innovative partnerships between Government agencies and private sector actors have expanded the sharing of sensitive information on terrorism-financing patterns and suspect individuals, thereby enabling law enforcement authorities to disrupt travel by foreign terrorist fighters, detect terrorists and individuals associated with terrorism networks and bring terrorists to justice.

44. Nonetheless, financial intelligence in the possession of entities in the private sector remains underused in many regions of the world. Suspicious transaction reports provided by financial institutions to identify potentially illicit activity sometimes lack key information that would support investigations by law enforcement agencies. A recent initiative of Governments, academic research centres and private-sector actors led, in October 2017, to the establishment of the Future of Financial Intelligence Sharing programme, which aims to support the sharing of financial intelligence and analysis of the impact of public-private partnership models in several jurisdictions.[66] The programme involves experts from financial institutions, law enforcement agencies and regulatory bodies.

45. INTERPOL is assisting the law enforcement agencies and financial intelligence units of Member States to trace and disrupt the flow of funds to terrorists and their supporters. Initiatives to combat the financing of terrorism include the promotion and inclusion of information on financial identities available in INTERPOL alerts as well as the development of direct relationships with financial intelligence units, aimed at bridging the gap between financial intelligence units and law enforcement agencies. The Anti-Terrorism Centre of the Commonwealth of Independent States is also working to bring together the efforts of financial intelligence units and competent authorities in combating terrorism financing.

[66] Including Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, China, Singapore and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

46. As part of its counter-financing of terrorism and financial-disruption training efforts, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continued to carry out its counter-financing of terrorism project in countries throughout Africa, in the Gulf States and in Afghanistan, as well as to develop its practical course on the listing of terrorist entities for sanctioning. In the Middle East and North Africa region, the Office conducted several workshops on enhancing national and regional capabilities to counter the financing of terrorism.

47. Other notable initiatives include the partnership between the Office of Counter-Terrorism, through the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, and the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit. In September 2017, a regional capacity-building workshop held in Dhaka focused on third-party asset-freezing requests. The workshop was attended by officials of financial intelligence units from six member States of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. It focused on best practices related to information and intelligence-sharing, judicial oversight and law enforcement support for the implementation of asset-freezing, pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions and the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force, especially in a regional or cross-border context. The workshop also highlighted new techniques being used by terrorist groups.

48. An analysis of trends and patterns in the misuse of social media is currently being conducted jointly by the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering and the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, in close cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. In October 2017, the Financial Action Task Force adopted a report on the financing of recruitment for purposes of terrorism, which notes how the use of financial tools has helped identify terrorist-recruitment networks. The Task Force is currently reviewing available terrorism-financing disruption strategies to address terrorism-financing threats and is continuing its work on the potential misuse of the financial technology and regulatory technology industries for terrorism-financing purposes. The Task Force is also collecting risk-related information from its members on the use of virtual currencies, including their use for financing terrorism.

49. Terrorism-financing risk assessments remain central to the development of effective strategies to counter the financing of terrorism. In this respect, the African financial action task force-style regional bodies[67] held a joint meeting, from 22 to 25 January 2018, which focused, inter alia, on good practices and lessons learned in conducting terrorism-financing risk assessments. UNODC, with the support of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, is also developing a methodology to conduct dedicated national and subregional terrorism-financing risk assessments.

50. Pursuant to Security Council resolutions 2331 (2016) and 2388 (2017), the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate has engaged with Member States and relevant multilateral bodies, including the Financial Action Task Force, to address potential links between terrorism financing and human trafficking. This issue is also being gradually introduced into the engagement of the Executive Directorate with Member States within the framework of assessment visits conducted on behalf of the Committee. In October 2017, the Task Force initiated an initiative aimed at examining possible links between human trafficking, money-laundering and terrorism financing.

[67] The Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group, the Inter-Governmental Task Force against Money-Laundering in Central Africa, the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa and the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force.

B. International law enforcement cooperation

51. Border security is the first line of defence against terrorism and organized crime, including the travel of foreign terrorist fighters, weapons-smuggling and trafficking in human beings. The United Nations and international and regional organizations have worked with Member States to expand the use of existing border-protection tools and databases, but Member States continue to face challenges in their efforts to implement comprehensive, up-to-date, human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive border-management strategies.

52. INTERPOL continues to encourage States to expand access to its secure round-the-clock police communications system (I-24/7) beyond national central bureaux to include front-line officers. However, some States continue to face challenges in the sharing of relevant information, including on foreign terrorist fighters. UNODC has significantly expanded foreign terrorist fighter-related assistance to South and South-East Asia, including for detection and interdiction through the INTERPOL I-24/7 system. The Office of Counter Terrorism, through United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, will provide assistance to Member States in West Africa and the Horn of Africa as part of its new border security management programme, developed in consultation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. From 5 to 8 September 2017, under the capacity-building framework of the regional Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism Initiative for the Group of Five for the Sahel, the Office organized a four-day regional workshop on border security management for experts from the member States of the Group, in cooperation with its permanent secretariat and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

53. States should have several mechanisms in place to screen travellers more effectively at ports of entry. In its resolution 2396 (2017), the Security Council emphasized the importance of utilizing biometric data to enhance border security and to identify foreign terrorist fighters and other individuals linked to terrorist activity. It also requested the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, in coordination with UNODC and other relevant United Nations bodies, INTERPOL and the private sector, in collaboration with Member States, to continue to collect and develop best practices on the systematic categorization, collection and sharing of biometric data by Member States, with a view to improving biometric standards and advancing the collection and use of biometric data to effectively identify terrorists. States must ensure the responsible use of biometrics and must implement measures to protect human rights in the collection, processing, storing and sharing of such data, including the right to privacy. The Working Group on Border Management and Law Enforcement of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force is working on the production of basic guiding principles for Member States in this area. With a grant from the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, both the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate are supporting the efforts of Member States, INTERPOL, the Criminal Records Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Biometrics Institute to increase awareness and understanding of how to enhance the use of biometric data in a manner that is in line with international human rights law and standards.

54. On 23 October 2017, the sharing of advance passenger information became mandatory under Annex 9 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Thus far, however, fewer than 60 States have introduced measures requiring airlines to provide advance passenger information. Over 100 Member States remain unable to effectively verify the possible presence of a foreign terrorist fighter on board an aircraft. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, in collaboration with relevant entities of the Counter-Terrorism

Implementation Task Force, is assisting Member States in establishing national advance passenger information systems, including through capacity-building consultations.

55. Member States are also required, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2396 (2017), to develop the capability to collect, process and analyse passenger name record data, in accordance with the relevant ICAO standards and recommended practices, and to ensure that such data is used by, and shared with, all competent national authorities, in accordance with international human rights law.

56. To counter the threat posed by improvised explosive devices, the Security Council, in its resolution 2368 (2017), encouraged Member States to share information, establish partnerships, develop national strategies and capabilities and strengthen efforts to prevent commercially available precursor materials and military munitions stockpiles from being utilized in the development of such devices. The continued dissemination, through the use of the Internet and social media, of information on, inter alia, terror-attack methodologies and the construction of improvised explosive devices poses additional challenges for law enforcement. project "Watchmaker", developed by INTERPOL, enables Member States to identify and track individuals suspected of involvement in the manufacture or use of explosives and provides operational and specialized support through the sharing of INTERPOL notices and warning messages on individuals manufacturing or using chemical improvised explosive devices.

57. In view of the rise in attacks perpetrated by ISIL and its supporters against soft targets, such as the tourism industry, and critical infrastructure, Member States should aim to enhance their ability to protect such targets, including by developing comprehensive national preparedness strategies. Some Member States have begun to implement such strategies, but others require assistance. In accordance with resolution 2341 (2017), the Working Group on the Protection of Critical Infrastructure including Vulnerable Targets, Internet and Tourism Security of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force is developing guidance for Member States in this area.

C. Protection of refugees and asylum seekers

58. The return and relocation of foreign terrorist fighters pose numerous challenges to the law enforcement and border control agencies of Member States. Those challenges are compounded by the continued impact of large-scale migration. International and regional organizations continue to support the efforts of States in this area. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) supports the efforts of States to uphold international protection principles while addressing legitimate security concerns. INTERPOL works with national authorities to facilitate their adoption of a holistic approach, including the use of all available INTERPOL tools and databases, as well as greater information exchange at the national and international levels.

D. International judicial cooperation

59. The need to address the evolving threat posed by ISIL and its affiliates, including the growing threat posed by returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters, has placed increased pressure on criminal justice systems and international judicial cooperation. Member States have worked to strengthen their cooperation by updating national legislation, strengthening regional and bilateral cooperation mechanisms, increasing training and resources for central authorities for mutual legal

assistance and extradition and other international cooperation focal points and increasing their use of up-to-date technology.

60. Regional organizations, including law enforcement, prosecutorial or judicial platforms, have worked to simplify and improve communications and coordination channels and to build trust among their members. In November 2017, UNODC and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate organized a regional meeting on effective central authorities for member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the aim of which was to raise awareness of the need to designate central authorities and to encourage the sharing of good practices, thus ensuring that central authorities are able to work together in an effective and expeditious manner.

61. Gaps remain, however. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate has found that, as of September 2017, only 25 per cent of the 77 States identified as being most affected by the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon had evaluated their existing criminal laws in light of the requirements of relevant Security Council resolutions. Only 10 per cent of those States had introduced new draft legislation; 25 per cent had amended existing laws. Progress made in strengthening cooperation at the regional level should be complemented by strengthened cross-regional cooperation.

62. Efforts to bring suspected foreign terrorist fighters to justice continue to be hampered by the difficulty of collecting sufficient admissible evidence to secure a conviction. Few States are able to collect information and evidence in conflict zones. Moreover, although a wealth of digital evidence does exist, relevant authorities are often unable to preserve, collect, share or use such evidence in court. This may be due to a lack of enabling legislation, ineffective public-private sector cooperation or challenges in the sharing of such information between States.

63. In its updated Technical Guide, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate provides guidance related to appointing, training and resourcing central authorities for mutual legal assistance and extradition, enhancing joint investigation mechanisms and introducing electronic communications and universal templates into mutual legal assistance procedures. The Executive Directorate, UNODC and the International Association of Prosecutors are currently developing a practical guide for requesting and gathering electronic evidence, including from private communications service providers, based on national manuals and protocols. The guide will identify steps to be taken at the national level to gather, preserve and share electronic evidence, with the overall goal of increasing the efficacy of mutual legal assistance practice worldwide.

64. In addition to stepping up efforts to prevent terrorist attacks, including through early detection, States should also ensure that special investigative techniques are used in a manner that protects confidentiality while also ensuring adequate judicial oversight and protection of the rights of the accused. The collection, use, preservation and sharing of evidence collected through social media and in conflict zones should be further strengthened since such evidence is often critical in detecting, monitoring, investigating and bringing to justice suspected foreign terrorist fighters, including returnees and relocators.

65. In order to address new and emerging counter-terrorism challenges, States should also ensure that they: (a) criminalize foreign terrorist fighter-related offences in a consistent and appropriate manner, with full respect for human rights, thereby overcoming hurdles relating to "dual criminality" that can undermine their ability to bring to justice, prosecute or extradite terrorists; (b) continue to improve training and resourcing for central authorities and appoint international cooperation focal points that are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week; (c) proactively share

information, especially among frontline officials; (d) make better use of technologies to exchange information in line with human rights safeguards and in support of the investigative process; (e) integrate the gender dimension and ensure that women's roles and needs are reflected, including their roles as perpetrators, victims and preventers; and (f) work at the bilateral, regional and international levels to build trust and overcome real or perceived hurdles to bringing foreign terrorist fighters to justice.

66. States also face specific challenges relating to cases involving children and juveniles who are forced or deceived into travelling to conflict zones. Additional challenges are posed by children born in conflict zones, particularly those who leave conflict zones without their parents or guardians or without identifying documents that confirm their nationality and parentage. Failure by certain States to comply with their international obligations relating to the protection of children within the criminal justice system poses an obstacle to international cooperation in relation to the families of foreign terrorist fighters. In its resolution 2395 (2017), the Security Council encouraged the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to integrate the impact of terrorism on children and children's rights into its work, especially issues relating to the families of returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Office of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict are developing a handbook for Member States on a human-rights-based treatment of children accompanying foreign terrorist fighters. The handbook will reflect lessons learned from relevant contexts, including through the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers, social welfare experience, cross-cultural communications and the views of religious leaders, with the Convention on the Rights of Child as the overarching framework.

67. In some Member States, children returning or relocating from ISIL-controlled territory are individually assessed to determine the appropriate care, security measures and interventions required. Since my previous report, several States have established national multidisciplinary teams to develop individually tailored treatment plans for children suspected of committing terrorist offences. The determination of the exact age of an alleged child offender returning or relocating from a conflict zone may pose challenges for prosecutors, investigators and the judiciary. Member States should ensure that any age-assessment procedures are context-specific, gender-sensitive and comply with international human rights standards.

E. Prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration

68. In view of the growing number of returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters, many Member States are paying increasing attention to prosecution strategies and rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2396 (2017), Member States are required to (a) ensure that any person who participates in the financing, planning, preparation or perpetration of terrorist acts, or in supporting terrorist acts, is brought to justice; and (b) develop and implement comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies and protocols, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including with respect to returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying spouses and children, as well as their suitability for rehabilitation; and (c) to carry out such actions in consultation, as appropriate, with local communities, mental health and education practitioners and other relevant civil society organizations and actors. UNODC and other relevant United Nations agencies continue to provide technical assistance to Member States in this regard.

69. As also emphasized by the Security Council in its resolution 2396 (2017), it is crucial to ensure that rehabilitation and reintegration programmes take the gender

dimension into account. Under the guidance of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate have proposed the establishment, in 2018, within the framework of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, of an Inter-Agency Working Group on Adopting a Gender-sensitive Approach to Countering Terrorism. The Working Group will assist Member States in organizing effective, data-driven, gender-responsive and human rights-based approaches to the rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters.

70. The United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration is currently updating guidance provided by the United Nations system on this subject. The updated guidance will address the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes in contexts where there are active terrorist groups, taking into consideration the intersection between such practices and the applicable international counter-terrorism framework, including the Security Council's call to develop prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

71. In its resolution 2349 (2017), the Security Council called on Member States of the Lake Chad Basin to urgently develop and implement, consistent with international law, in particular international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law, as applicable, vetting criteria and processes that facilitate the prompt assessment of all persons associated with Boko Haram and ISIL who are in the custody of authorities, including persons who have been captured by, or have surrendered to, the authorities, or who are found in refugee or internally displaced persons camps. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and UNODC have initiated activities in Chad and Nigeria to support the development of a comprehensive approach to prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating persons associated with Boko Haram.

72. In early 2018, the four States of the Lake Chad Basin will engage in a regional consultation on the need for a harmonized regional approach to the treatment of persons associated with Boko Haram, with the support of additional partners, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Member States of the region would also benefit from assistance in promoting inter-agency cooperation among the military forces and the civilian investigatory and prosecutorial authorities to ensure that evidence is appropriately collected and preserved, with the aim of bringing terrorists to justice.

73. Although rehabilitation and reintegration efforts are often context-specific, some lessons learned may be more widely applicable. For example, some approaches appear to have benefited from efforts to work with, and to support, families and receiving communities at an early stage and to assess their willingness and capacity to assist with reintegration efforts before prisoners are released. Other examples demonstrate the importance of ensuring proper coordination and clear leadership in developing and implementing inter-agency and multidisciplinary models. Successful programmes must also consider the special needs of children and youth.

F. Managing the spread of violent extremism in prisons

74. In view of the growing number of foreign terrorist fighters, returnees and relocators entering the criminal justice system, the role of prisons in tackling the phenomenon has become more important. International and regional organizations and the specialized agencies have increased their efforts to assist Member States in

developing measures and programmes to prevent or counter radicalization and recruitment by terrorist and violent extremist groups in prisons.

75. The initiative of UNODC, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate on managing the spread of violent extremism in prisons is one example of inter-agency cooperation to counter this challenge. The initiative led to the publication of the UNODC "Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons", which helps prison staff to manage the risk of radicalization in prisons and provides relevant information and technical assistance on this subject to pilot States. Specific objectives of the initiative include fostering cooperation among the relevant national authorities, strengthening prison safety and security and providing advice on prison-based disengagement programmes and social reintegration after release. Additional guidance has been developed by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, the Council of Europe, the European Commission's Radicalisation Awareness Network and the Global Counterterrorism Forum. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has also provided capacity-building inputs on preventing the spread of violent extremism that leads to terrorism in prisons, as part of its multidimensional technical assistance programme on the prevention of violent extremism. The European Commission has identified the prevention of radicalization in prisons and the development of effective disengagement and deradicalization programmes as priorities in its European Agenda on Security.

76. Nonetheless significant gaps remain. There are few programmes aimed at preventing, addressing, measuring or understanding the radicalization or recruitment of female prisoners. Programmes for male prisoners are rarely duplicated for females. Programmes aimed at managing violent extremism in prisons often do not consider the special vulnerabilities of incarcerated children. In many States, children are detained alongside adult criminals, putting them at risk of mistreatment and abuse. This can make them feel more reliant on adults for protection while incarcerated, and thus more vulnerable to radicalization or recruitment.

G. Countering terrorist narratives and engaging communities in approaches to the prevention of violent extremism

77. Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector have strengthened their efforts to combat ISIL narratives and ideologies, both online and offline. Recent approaches have focused primarily on three areas: the disruption of ISIL propaganda; public-private partnerships; and counter-narrative campaigns. Governments have a crucial role to play in engaging with communities and industry to promote counter-narratives and alternative messages. A growing number of States have facilitated grassroots campaigning by providing financial and capacity-building assistance and by promoting public-private partnerships in this area.

78. Several technology companies have stepped up their efforts to counter terrorism on their platforms. In August 2017, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube launched the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, in collaboration with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate-led ICT for Peace "Tech against Terrorism" initiative. The Forum, which launched a knowledge-sharing platform on 29 November 2017, aims to develop technological solutions, conduct research on counter-speech and share knowledge and experiences with smaller start-up technology companies, building their capabilities to prevent the exploitation of their platforms and services for terrorist purposes. The "Tech against Terrorism" initiative

has also worked with the founding members of the Forum to organize several regional workshops with smaller technology companies and civil-society representatives to share best practices, including on counter-messaging.

79. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2354 (2017), the Counter-Terrorism Committee, with the support of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, has: (a) conducted outreach to entities (including religious actors, civil society organizations and private-sector actors) with expertise and experience in crafting counter-narratives in order to strengthen its understanding of relevant good practices; (b) developed initiatives to strengthen public-private partnerships in countering terrorist narratives; and (c) maintained an up-to-date list of national, regional and global counter-narrative initiatives.

80. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate is also leveraging the expertise of academic entities and think tanks in this field, in particular through its Global Counter-Terrorism Research Network. Based on information received so far, the Executive Directorate has developed preliminary recommendations and good practices for countering terrorist narratives through content-based responses.

81. In September 2017, UN-Women, with the support of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, and in partnership with UNDP and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, organized two regional workshops in South-East and South Asia. Lessons learned from the workshops highlight the importance of: grassroots efforts to advance the values of tolerance, pluralism and understanding as components of an alternative messaging campaign; ensuring that national legal frameworks protect freedom of opinion and expression, pluralism and media diversity; integrating a gender-sensitive approach when designing and implementing campaigns; and ensuring early prevention through relevant childhood digital literacy critical-thinking programmes.

82. In July 2017, the Office of Counter-Terrorism completed phases I and II of a project on "Preventing violent extremism through strategic communications". Phase I resulted in the drafting of the United Nations strategic communications approach to preventing violent extremism. Phase II included country visits to develop a standard methodology for the provision of capacity-building to requesting Member States and United Nations entities. Preparations have now begun for the provision of support under phase III, including: (a) training workshops to raise awareness; (b) advice on ways to develop a supportive institutional framework; and (c) technical support to train government officials and others on how to implement a strategic communications framework on the prevention of violent extremism.

83. Notable progress has been achieved but significant challenges remain. Countering terrorist narratives requires consistent, long-term coordinated engagement. Pursuant to Council resolution 2354 (2017), the Committee and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate will continue to facilitate international cooperation to implement the comprehensive international framework to counter terrorist narratives, identify and compile existing good practices and provide clear direction, guidelines and technical support, as required.

IV. Observations

84. Despite the progress made by Member States in implementing a wide range of measures to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism, and despite recent military advances against ISIL in both Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, the group and its affiliates continue to pose a significant threat to international peace and

security. Acts of terrorism continue to undermine sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian action.

85. Full implementation of the international legal framework against ISIL and foreign terrorist fighters by all Member States would strengthen international cooperation against that threat. The recent restructuring of the United Nations counter-terrorism architecture is aimed at ensuring that the United Nations system can deliver coordinated, coherent and efficient support to Member States. Similarly, the Security Council, by its resolution 2395 (2017), extended the mandate of Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate until 31 December 2021 and emphasized the centrality of its expert assessment of the implementation of relevant Council resolutions. The resolution also underscored the essential role of the Executive Directorate within the United Nations in identifying emerging issues, trends and developments relating to the implementation of key counter-terrorism resolutions, including through the use of its Global Counter-Terrorism Research Network, which brings together research institutions worldwide to share evidence-based research findings from diverse regional perspectives. In that resolution, the Council also noted the expertise of the Executive Directorate in supporting the development and promotion of well-informed counter-terrorism responses and urged the Office of Counter-Terrorism and all other relevant United Nations bodies to take the recommendations and analysis provided by the Executive Directorate into account in the implementation of their programmes. The resolution provides for enhanced coordination between the Office of Counter Terrorism and the Executive Directorate, as well as between all relevant Security Council and relevant bodies mandated by the General Assembly.

86. The foreign terrorist fighters capacity-building implementation plan is a useful tool for coordinating the efforts of various United Nations entities to address the different aspects of the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon outlined in this report. I encourage Member States to engage with the relevant entities involved in the implementation of the plan and to consider ways to mobilize remaining resources as needed.